

AESTHETIC ANALYSIS OF A PARAN ĀMAD IN KATHAK*

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Paran āmad is one of the common intra-forms (or items)¹ that make a Kathak recital. It is an essay in pure dance. That is, it is not 'about' anything in outer reality. Nor does it seek to express any emotion. Its charm lies wholly in the way it squares *ang* with the (formal character of) *bols*, and in its handling of rhythm. I seek in this article to see how the 'look' of a *paran āmad* depends on the character and knitting of its syllables, and on the accord of this syllabic content with bodily figuration (अंग बनाना). It would help understanding if I distinguish the art-elements here involved: the basic rhythm (as marked by the *lahrā-thekā* twosome), the individual character—both audile² and rhythmic—of the *bols*, their order, the intervals that hold the segments apart, changes of pace, and the demands of syllables in respect of bodily aptness. Let me now cite the pattern in its syllabic and rhythmic form:

घातक	थुंगा	घागे	दिगता	घाघिता	धित्ता	कड़घा	तक्काथुंगा	ताकिटतका	तिटक्तागदिगिन
1	5	6	9	11	12	13	1	9	13
ता	थेई	तत	थेई	आ	थेई	तत	थेई	थेईत	थेईत
1	5	9	13	1	8	9	13	1	

Perhaps the most obviously likeable feature of this composition is its terminal definiteness. Those who care only for the inner intricacy of long and involute rhythmic patterns often tend to be casual in respect of *ang* relating to the termini. Such indifference is hardly proper, for it is bound to detract from the overall appeal of the recital. Every pattern as danced should

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1. Why I prefer the word 'intra-form' to *item* has already been explained by me in my essay: 'Kathak-Some Terms and Distinctions' in *Sangeet Natak*, No. 51.
2. This means 'relating to hearing'. So it covers the *bols* as recited (or in पढ़न्त), as played by the drummer *and* as danced. Their own character, however, is³ manifest most truly in *parhant* or recitation.

seem to be self-complete. Otherwise the total performance will become too loose and flowing, and deficient in inner clarity. Its content will tend to appear a jumble. The risk of such terminal vagueness of *ang* and rhythmic form is minimized if, as in the pattern under review, the ends are provided by open *bols* like 'ता' and 'घा'. I do not wish to hold that these are the only permissible *aksharas* to serve as terminal endings. As we know, there are many good patterns which begin and end differently. But, in so far as the essence of Indian classical dance is not mere movement (as against action)³ but movement *with* some semblance of accordant *ang*—a requirement from which perhaps only गिनती के तोड़े are exempt—where the terminal *bols* (or syllables) are not themselves open and definite, extra care will have to be taken—may be, by way of emphatic drumming, *parhant* or gestural incisiveness—to provide clarity to the two ends. In any case, the intrinsic character of the first and the last *bols* has to be kept in mind. From this point of view, घिननन provides a better opening—because it is more insistent—than, say, तिकघा; and as the final *bol*, घा is preferable to थेई unless the latter is demanded to consummate a तिया or is projected by means of specially attractive *ang*. It may here be noted that in some *Kavitta*-s the 'घा' of 'राघा' as a closing word serves this purpose as well, that is, of helping the seeming self-completion of the intra-form.

But if it is to seem articulate on the inside, a pattern should reveal clear segments, each with its own clear beginning and end. Otherwise it will lack inner intervals and so give no room to *ang* to unfold itself. Long stretches of लड़ी बन्द syllables are therefore to be kept out, for they just do not permit the beauteous variety of bodily configuration that good dancing needs, even where it is *nritya*; they tend to restrict dance to mere liquid movement. This is so where the pattern presented draws too heavily upon syllables like दि ग दिग. My own view is that if the key requirement of winsome bodily shapes is to be kept in mind, a tuft of लड़ी बन्द syllables is desirable only to the extent to which it provides a foil to, and so heightens the held-apart look or relaxed distinctness of *bols* that come before or after it.

Going by such criteria, I find the *āmad* in question admirable. It opens with three clear segments (from the first to the twelfth beat) that give full room to *ang*; and their end-side *bols* are all unmistakable: घा, ता, गा. What is more, the formal character of some *bols* here demands a measure of *depth* in *ang*. I have in mind, as I so speak, the letters थु and धि with their nasal ring. थो is merely open and a little round. थु is different, specially as coupled with गा; it demands a suggestion of depth, or inwardness in *ang*. Similarly, धिता is different from, and demands a fuller *ang* than धिता.

3. Common instances of 'action' represented in Kathak are: lifting the mount (Govardhan) on the little finger in गोवर्धन की गत and crushing the hood of (the serpent) *kaliya* in the pattern which projects कालिया दमन. But whereas bodily movements are here obviously involved, in pure dance no 'action' is represented. So movement, not action, is essential to dance. But, in *our* classical dance movement has to accord with *bols*.

We have to heed such differences. Otherwise, what is the point in at all having *bols* of diverse character in addition to beats?

Here, in the *āmad* under review, a string (or लड़ी) of rapid syllables occurs only once, covering but 6 beats roughly; it is: तकिटतका तिटकतग-दिगिन. The syllables that forerun and follow it are all clearly slower in pace. So the little spurt does not cancel, but only serves to heighten by contrast the *āmad*'s overall impressiveness, a quality which is seen in the very way the intra-form opens, its first three segments all beginning with घा which is perhaps the Kathak's key syllable to make an accent unmistakable.

Another point may be made in respect of the syllabic string (or लड़ी) in question. It is on the one hand impressive because of its filling and pace; but on the other hand, because none of its constituent *bols* is open and assertive, it does not appear heavy or bold. So it goes well with both the preceding *pakhāwaj bols* and the gentler ones of dance that follow it. In a way, it partakes of the character of both kinds of syllables that it conjoins: the *pakhāwaj* and the dance *bols*, and therefore, though it serves as a link quite well, it does not seem to jut out, and leaves the pattern *phenomenally* one.

But am I right in affirming that it is good as a link? I believe, yes; and this not only because of its character as relief which I have already spoken of, but because the manner of its neighbouring *bols* on either side seems adapted to the link. Let me make it clear. The third segment घाधिता is clearly brief. It may be expected to give the dancer breathing-time to get set for the bigger bunch of *bols*; धिता...धुंगा, which, in turn, paves the way for dancing the next, but longer and quicker knitwork of *bols*, that is, the link we have been speaking of: तकिट...गिन. The ता that follows गिन immediately appears aesthetically apt not only because the adjacency of a closed and an open sound provides likeable contrast, but because the spurt needs a point of return to the basic pace.

This pace, be it noted, is set by the very deliberateness of the first *bol*'s utterance. The घा which opens a pattern is of necessity steady. Its own inner *laya* cannot be *drut*. If out of impatience to move ahead to the other following *bols* we try to utter this syllable quickly, its *mātrā* gets cramped, and so its literal character is negated. As it is, even the immediately following तक is here fairly steady. I admit that this *bol*, तक, is in the present intra-form not to be uttered stiffly, that is, with its second letter, क cut off firmly and abruptly. But nor is it to seem, I rejoin, clearly relaxed in the manner of तक् or as ending with a kind of upward twist, say, in the way of तका. The right manner of uttering the *bol* in question here is identical with the way we articulate the word तक in sentences of the following kind: 'चलो, जरा वहां तक घूम आएं. In other words, it is fairly steady. If, merely with a view to producing something different, one changes this everyday manner into an upturning and

lightly uttered तका it would be clearly inconsistent (in pace) with the steadiness of the opening धा, as also with the *amad*'s overall look of dignity. That the pattern is meant to so look is unquestionable. It is indeed the clear demand, as I have suggested, of the liberal use of धा, and of *bindis* in थुंगा and धिता which demand a measure of depth in *ang*; and of the very intervals between the segments distinguished which permit and invite an opening of *ang*.

We may also see how, in the pattern under review, the very formal character of *bols*, where it does not expressly demand a bold and open *ang*, at least goes well with such a disposition of the body. Syllables like धा and ता just do not permit figural compression. But what deserves emphasis, because it is commonly ignored, is the fact that many of the syllabic pairs here seem to open, because whereas the first *akshara* or *bol* is subdued or 'closed' (or इकार या उकार का) the immediately following one is open. Thus, see here the following: थुंगा, दिगता, धिता, धिता, तक्का, तकिटतका. A dominance of *bols* like दिग दिग थेई would here blight the very essential character of an *amad* which is a kind of formal openness or flowering.

I may now focus on some points I have so far hinted in respect of Kathak aesthetics:

First, I have distinguished three laws governing integration of *bols* into patterns. These may be put as the laws of terminal definiteness, segmental clarity and aesthetic relief or punctuation. The first, we have seen, is of help in making a pattern appear self-complete. The second, on the one hand, facilitates *ang*-flowering (अंग का खिलना); and, on the other hand, makes the pattern itself seem spacious (कुशादा) on the inside. The third has to be brought out, because I hinted it but dimly while speaking of the relief (or contrast) that the *bols* तकिटतकातिटकतगदिगिन provide to the syllables that precede and follow them. The point here is that if a syllable is to appear sparkling we have to put it between or at the end of an array of closed or subdued *bols*. See here, for instance, the following placement of the lively syllable त्रामः तिगधादिगदिगदिगथो दिग दिग थेई त्राम थेई. Contrarily, if any sparkling *bols* like त्राम, वड़ान, त्रैवड़ are put closely together, the intended effect of sparkle will be lost, because of absence of contrast.

In respect of a *bol*'s own character there is one more hint which I have thrown incidentally. Just as the body may seem to be taut, relaxed or upturned, so can a dance-syllable. It is therefore by no means improper to speak of the *ang* of a *bol* itself. I have, for instance, distinguished three states of the *ang* of the syllable तक्, besides its look when we utter the word simply in the sense of 'upto'. These three are: तक् (pronounced briefly and stiffly), तक् and तका. The principle is that in actual dance such little differences have to be kept in mind. Otherwise, the cardinal requirement of *ang-bol* accordance will be disobeyed.

Intensive though it fairly is, it would be wrong to suppose that my analysis of the *paran āmad* in question is exhaustive. I have missed a vital point which may now be mentioned. In a whole Kathak recital the net 'look' of an intra-form cannot but (in part) be determined by what precedes and follows it. A *tlhāt* enables the Kathak to gently slip into the region of dance, transfiguring the body as it is into what it should be in accordance with the needs of the art. A *paran āmad*, on the other hand, appears to proclaim, in a way, the advent of dance; for, the two most essential elements of Kathak—responsiveness of *ang* to the demands of *bols*, and the flow of rhythm as both an even ground and as a decorative upsurge—are here for the first time manifest.